

HOLIDAY  
AND OTHER POEMS

JOHN DAVIDSON



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HOLIDAY  
AND OTHER POEMS

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HOLIDAY  
AND OTHER POEMS

*WITH A NOTE ON POETRY*

BY  
JOHN DAVIDSON

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# CONTENTS

## POEMS

	PAGE
HOLIDAY . . . . .	3
THE LAST SONG . . . . .	9
A RUNNABLE STAG . . . . .	14
MERRY ENGLAND . . . . .	20
LABURNUM AND LILAC . . . . .	25
APPLE-TREES . . . . .	29
NOVEMBER :—	
I. REGENT'S PARK . . . . .	32
II. THE ENFIELD ROAD . . . . .	33
III. EPPING FOREST . . . . .	35
IV. BOX HILL . . . . .	36
V. LONDON, W. . . . .	37
VI. THE CHILTERNs . . . . .	39
YULETIDE . . . . .	41

## ECLOGUES

	PAGE
I. THE IDES OF MARCH . . .	49
II. ST. MARK'S EVE . . .	58
III. THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF MAY .	67
IV. BAPTIST TIDE . . .	77
V. THE FEAST OF ST. MARTHA .	87
VI. BARTLEMAS . . .	98
VII. OUR DAY . . .	107
VIII. NEW YEAR'S EVE . . .	118
L'ENVOI . . .	128
ON POETRY . . .	131

# POEMS



## HOLIDAY

LITHE and listen, gentlemen :  
Other knight of sword or pen  
Shall not, while the planets shine,  
Spend a holiday like mine :—

Fate and I, we played at dice :  
Thrice I won and lost the main ;  
Thrice I died the death, and thrice  
By my will I lived again.

First, a woman broke my heart,  
As a careless woman can,  
Ere the aureoles depart  
From the woman and the man.

Dead of love, I found a tomb  
Anywhere : beneath, above,  
Worms nor stars transpierced the gloom  
Of the sepulchre of love.

Wine-cups were the charnel-lights ;  
Festal songs, the funeral dole ;  
Joyful ladies, gallant knights,  
Comrades of my buried soul.

Tired to death of lying dead  
In a common sepulchre,  
On an Easter morn I sped  
Upward where the world's astir.

Soon I gathered wealth and friends ;  
Donned the livery of the hour ;  
And atoning diverse ends  
Bridged the gulf to place and power.



All the brilliances of Hell  
Crushed by me, with honeyed breath  
Fawned upon me till I fell,  
By pretenders done to death.

Buried in an outland tract,  
Long I rotted in the mould,  
Though the virgin woodland lacked  
Nothing of the age of gold.

Roses spiced the dews and damps  
Nightly falling of decay ;  
Dawn and sunset lit the lamps  
Where entombed I deeply lay.

My Companions of the Grave  
Were the flowers, the growing grass ;  
Larks intoned a morning stave ;  
Nightingales, a midnight mass.

But at me, effete and dead,  
Did my spirit gibe and scoff:  
Then the gravecloth from my head,  
And my shroud—I shook them off!

Drawing strength and subtle craft  
Out of ruin's husk and core,  
Through the earth I ran a shaft  
Upward to the light once more.

Soon I made me wealth and friends;  
Donned the livery of the age;  
And atoning many ends  
Reigned as sovereign, priest, and mage.

But my pomp and towering state,  
Puissance and supreme device  
Crumbled on the cast of Fate—  
Fate, that plays with loaded dice.

I whose arms had harried Hell  
Naked faced a heavenly host :  
Carved with countless wounds I fell,  
Sadly yielding up the ghost.

In a burning mountain thrown  
(Titans such a tomb attain)  
Many a grisly age had flown  
Ere I rose and lived again.

Parched and charred I lay ; my cries  
Shook and rent the mountain-side ;  
Lustres, decades, centuries  
Fled while daily there I died.

But my essence and intent  
Ripened in the smelting fire :  
Flame became my element ;  
Agony, my soul's desire.

Twenty centuries of Pain,  
    Mightier than Love or Art,  
Woke the meaning in my brain  
    And the purpose of my heart.

Straightway then aloft I swam  
    Through the mountain's sulphurous sty:  
Not eternal death could damn  
    Such a hardy soul as I.

From the mountain's burning crest  
    Like a god I come again,  
And with an immortal zest  
    Challenge Fate to throw the main.

## THE LAST SONG

“SONGSTER”—say you?—“sing!”

Not a note have I!

Effort cannot bring

Fancy from the sky:

Hark!—the rusty string!

Leave me here to die.

“Songster, songster, sing!

Tune your harp and try.

Sing! we bid you sing

Once before you die!”

Withered, angry, mad,

Who would list to me,

Since my singing sad  
    Troubled earth and sea  
When my heart was glad  
    And my fancy free ?  
    “Sad or joyful, sing !  
        Look about, above !  
Trust the world and sing  
    Once again of love !”

Love ? I know the word :  
    Love is of the rose.  
Have you seen or heard  
    Love among the snows ?  
Yet my heart is stirred !  
    Nay, my fancy glows !  
    “Summon all your powers ;  
        Sing of joy or woe—  
Love among the flowers,  
    Love amidst the snow.”

Death is but a trance :

Life, but now begun !

Welcome change and chance :

Though my days are done,

Let the planets dance

Lightly round the sun !

Morn and evening clasp

Earth with loving hands—

In a ruddy grasp

All the pleasant lands !

Now I hear the deep

Bourdon of the bee,

Like a sound asleep

Wandering o'er the lea ;

While the song-birds keep

Urging nature's plea.

Hark ! the violets pray

Swooning in the sun !

Hush ! the roses say

Love and death are one !

Loud my dying rhyme

Like a trumpet rings ;

Love in death sublime

Soars on sovran wings,

While the world and time

Fade like shadowy things.

“ Love upon his lip

Hovers loath to part ;

Death's benignant grip

Fastens on his heart.”

Look, a victor hies

Bloody from the fight,

And a woman's eyes

Greet him in the night—



Softly from the skies

Like sidereal light !

“ Love is all in all,

Life and death are great.

Bring a purple pall ;

Bury him in state.”

## A RUNNABLE STAG

WHEN the pods went pop on the broom, green  
broom,

And apples began to be golden-skinned,

We harboured a stag in the Priory coomb,

And we feathered his trail up-wind, up-wind,

We feathered his trail up-wind—

A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,

A runnable stag, a kingly crop,

Brow, bay and tray and three on top,

A stag, a runnable stag.

Then the huntsman's horn rang yap, yap, yap,

And "Forwards" we heard the harbourer  
shout ;

But 'twas only a brocket that broke a gap  
In the beechen underwood, driven out,  
From the underwood antlered out  
By warrant and might of the stag, the stag,  
The runnable stag, whose lordly mind  
Was bent on sleep, though beamed and  
tined  
He stood, a runnable stag.

So we tufted the covert till afternoon  
With Tinkerman's Pup and Bell-of-the-North;  
And hunters were sulky and hounds out of tune  
Before we tufted the right stag forth,  
Before we tufted him forth,  
The stag of warrant, the wily stag,  
The runnable stag with his kingly crop,  
Brow, bay and tray and three on top,  
The royal and runnable stag.

It was Bell-of-the-North and Tinkerman's  
Pup

That stuck to the scent till the copse was  
drawn.

"Tally ho ! tally ho !" and the hunt was up,  
The tufters whipped and the pack laid on,  
The resolute pack laid on,  
And the stag of warrant away at last,  
The runnable stag, the same, the same,  
His hoofs on fire, his horns like flame,  
A stag, a runnable stag.

"Let your gelding be : if you check or chide  
He stumbles at once and you're out of the  
hunt ;

For three hundred gentlemen, able to ride,  
On hunters accustomed to bear the brunt,  
Accustomed to bear the brunt,

Are after the runnable stag, the stag,  
The runnable stag with his kingly crop,  
Brow, bay and tray and three on top,  
The right, the runnable stag."

By perilous paths in coomb and dell,  
The heather, the rocks, and the river-bed,  
The pace grew hot, for the scent lay well,  
And a runnable stag goes right ahead,  
The quarry went right ahead—  
Ahead, ahead, and fast and far ;  
His antlered crest, his cloven hoof,  
Brow, bay and tray and three aloof,  
The stag, the runnable stag.

For a matter of twenty miles and more,  
By the densest hedge and the highest  
wall,

Through herds of bullocks he baffled the lore  
Of harbourer, huntsman, hounds and all,  
Of harbourer hounds and all—

The stag of warrant, the wily stag,  
For twenty miles, and five and five,  
He ran, and he never was caught alive,  
This stag, this runnable stag.

When he turned at bay in the leafy gloom,  
In the emerald gloom where the brook ran  
deep,  
He heard in the distance the rollers boom,  
And he saw in a vision of peaceful sleep,  
In a wonderful vision of sleep,  
A stag of warrant, a stag, a stag,  
A runnable stag in a jewelled bed,  
Under the sheltering ocean dead,  
A stag, a runnable stag.

So a fateful hope lit up his eye,  
And he opened his nostrils wide again,  
And he tossed his branching antlers high  
As he headed the hunt down the Charlockglen,  
As he raced down the echoing glen  
For five miles more, the stag, the stag,  
For twenty miles, and five and five,  
Not to be caught now, dead or alive,  
The stag, the runnable stag.

Three hundred gentlemen, able to ride,  
Three hundred horses as gallant and free,  
Beheld him escape on the evening tide,  
Far out till he sank in the Severn Sea,  
Till he sank in the depths of the sea—  
The stag, the buoyant stag, the stag  
That slept at last in a jewelled bed  
Under the sheltering ocean spread,  
The stag, the runnable stag.

## MERRY ENGLAND

ISLAND-KINGDOM, our island-state,  
Merry England, where fancy dwells  
In pageant, pilgrimage, high debate,  
And sprightly music of morris-bells;  
Tourneys for love and battles for hate;  
Torches, garlands, exultant bells—  
Challenging trumpets and festal bells;  
Wars of the Roses, land-locked strife,  
World-wide wars with France and Spain:  
The colour and pulse of that gallant life—  
Shall we never recover the mood again?  
  
Rhythmic deeds, melodious words:—  
Merry England, the heart of mirth:—



Songs of lovers and songs of birds ;

A bell for death and a bell for birth—

Jubilant fifths and sombre thirds :

Pessimist ? Optimist ?—death and birth !

Englishmen only on English earth !

Confident daring, travail and strife,

Battle and storm on the Spanish Main—

How shall the fancy that donned that life

Be decked and renewed with such pride  
again ?

England's fancy shall live again—

Merry England across the seas !—

Jewelled with isles of the Spanish Main,

Gifts of the opulent destinies :

England's heart and England's brain,

Throbbing and thinking in many seas

Belov'd of the opulent destinies.

Bluebird, oriole, bobolink,

Hark to them, hear them how they sing,  
Where England's Canadians work and think,  
Woo and wed in the throng of Spring !

Axes ring on the mountain-sides—

England's gain from England's loss !—  
Lonely at night the ranchman rides,  
Humming a tune to the Southern Cross ;  
Argosies on Austral tides,  
From Charles's Wain to the Southern Cross,  
Barter the Plough for the Southern Cross !  
Lord ! how the English hew their way,  
Courage and fortune leading the van !  
Round the world with the break of day,  
Room for him, room for the Englishman !

Saxon, Norman, Dansker, Celt—

Merry England, mother of mirth !—

Gird the earth with an English belt,  
Englishmen all to the ends of the earth !  
Gold and grain on Rand and Veldt,  
Orchards, harvests over the earth—  
Liners and merchantmen round the earth ;  
Power from East to Western Ind,  
Power and pomp on the Indian Main,  
And wonder with every whispering wind  
To dip our dreams in the dew again.

England, decked and dowered by fate—  
Room for England, so please you room !  
Sea-Kings' realm, our Ocean-state,  
Woven upon the world's wide loom ;  
Dyed and tried in high debate,  
And ever renewed on the world's wide loom,  
With weaving fleets in a world-wide loom—  
Warp and woof of the sea's wide loom :

Shall garnish fancy in every land

With rhythmic deed and delight again—

Merry England from strand to strand,

From the Spanish Main to the Indian Main.

## LABURNUM AND LILAC

WHERE the New River strays,  
Eddying in olive green  
And chrysophrase,  
And briefly seen  
In traffic-troubled ways,  
Laburnum showers  
Its verdant gold,  
Its clustered flowers  
Instilled and scrolled  
With emerald sap :  
Green-tinted gold  
In April's lap  
Unpursed, unrolled ;

A mint of flowers,  
A hoard untold,  
Laburnine showers  
Of greenish gold.

Like ostrich plumes  
The jolly donahs wear,  
Light-tressed or dark,  
The lilac blooms  
In every park and square  
And blooms in Finsbury Park ;  
Or heliotrope or mauve,  
Snowy or dark,  
The lilac blooms  
In white and purple plumes.

“ What ? Russell Square ! ”  
There’s lilac there !

And Torrington

And Woburn Square

Intrepid don

The season's wear.

In Gordon Square and Euston Square—

There's lilac, there's laburnum there !

In green and gold and lavender

Queen Square and Bedford Square,

All Bloomsbury and all Soho

With every sunbeam gayer grow,

Greener grow and gayer.

The lindens in the Mall

Resound with bees ;

The plane-trees shed their bark—

The eager trees

That promptly grow so tall ;

And in St. James's Park

Full-throated chant  
The song-thrush and the merle  
Till dusk forbids,  
And dim-eyed night encamps  
Where now the chestnuts vaunt  
Their leafy pyramids  
And lustrous lamps  
Of ruby, gold, and pearl ;  
But in St. James's shade  
Of elms antique,  
The mystic porch  
Of Nature's bridal-room  
That coupled songsters seek,  
The lilac swings a censer  
Of ravishing perfume,  
And rich laburnums braid  
The green-gilt gloom  
With flame intenser  
Than the chestnut's torch.



## APPLE-TREES

WHEN autumn stains and dapples  
The diverse land,  
Thickly studded with apples  
The apple-trees stand.

Their mystery none discovers,  
So none can tell—  
Not the most passionate lovers  
Of garth and fell ;  
For the silent sunlight weaves  
The orchard spell,  
Bough, bole, and root,  
Mysterious, hung with leaves,  
Embossed with fruit.

Though merle and throstle were loud,  
Silent *their* passion in spring,  
A blush of blossom wild-scented ;  
And now when no song-birds sing,  
They are heavy with apples and proud  
And supremely contented—  
All fertile and green and sappy,  
No wish denied,  
Exceedingly quiet and happy  
And satisfied !

No jealousy, anger, or fashion  
Of strife  
Perturbs in their stations  
The apple-trees. Life  
Is an effortless passion,  
Fruit, bough, and stem,  
A beautiful patience  
For them.

Frost of the harvest-moon  
Changes their sap to wine ;  
Ruddy and golden soon  
Their clustered orbs will shine,  
By favour  
Of many a wind,  
Of morn and noon and night,  
Fulfilled from core to rind  
With savour  
Of all delight.

## NOVEMBER

### I

#### *Regent's Park*

POPLARS, ashes, flaunting wreaths of June  
Green among the tarnished oaks, outstayed  
Lindens, plane-trees, chestnuts, elms so soon  
Ragged, draggle-tailed, or stripped and flayed.

Somnolent canal and urban wold,  
Lawn and lake with saffron leaves and red,  
Crimson leaves and olive, brown and gold,  
Bronze and topaz leaves<sup>1</sup> engarlanded,

Underneath the feet of winter flung—  
Cloth of Bagdad richer than the stuff  
Woven in Tyrian looms, by poets sung  
Barbarous when the world was young enough

Frankly to adore a purple stain—  
Graced the season mantled in its breath  
Glittering pale, or draped in swarthy rain,  
Victor in decay and peer of death.

## II

*The Enfield Road*

Capitalled and coped with massive cloud,  
Lofty elms, a wayside colonnade,  
Shaft or bole erect and interboughed,  
Forestward, a beckoning passage made.

Like a golden haze, a misty veil

Diapered with sequins, foliage lined

All the vista, yellow discs and frail

Stalks that snapped against the chariest wind.

Flapping rooks alit on blighted sheaves ;

Ruddy haws in ragged hedges glowed ;

Elfin companies of withered leaves

Pattered nowhere down the sodden road.

Sullen in the west across the floor

Swept and garnished of the wintry plain,

Sunset smouldered like a furnace-door

Black and shot with cramoisie in grain.

## III

*Epping Forest*

Woods and coppices by tempest lashed ;  
Pollard shockheads glaring in the rain ;  
Jet-black underwood with crimson splashed—  
Rich November, one wet crimson stain !

Turf that whispered moistly to the tread ;  
Bursts of laughter from the shuffled leaves ;  
Pools of light in distant arbours spread ;  
Depths of darkness under forest eaves.

High above the wind the clouds at rest  
Emptied every vat and steeply hurled  
Reservoirs and floods ; the wild nor'west  
Raked the downpour ere it reached the world ;

Part in wanton sport and part in ire,  
    Flights of rain on ruddy foliage rang :  
Woven showers like sheets of silver fire  
    Streamed; and all the forest rocked and sang.

## IV

*Box Hill*

Brilliant month by legend slandered so !  
    Down in Surrey in the shining air  
Mid-November saw the woodland grow  
    Green as summer still, and still as fair :  
  
Elms perhaps, and fragrant limes forlorn  
    Drooped a branch, yet half I thought to hear  
Men and swift machines among the corn,  
    Voices and the ringing harvest-gear.



Sunset saw I from the sinuous height

Box Hill rears on sombre Mulla's bank :

Darker and more dark the ruby light

Over Polsdon Arbour dying sank ;

But or ever Time's nocturnal seal

Fixed the doom of day, the mid-moon's power

Did in star-attended state repeal

Darkness and the sentence of the hour.

V

*London, W.*

Deep delight in volume, sound, and mass,

Shadow, colour, movement, multitudes,

Murmurs, cries, the traffic's rolling bass—

Subtle city of a thousand moods !

Distance, rumour, mystery, things that count,  
Bravely in the memory scored and limned !  
Sunset, welling like a crimson fount  
Underneath the Marble Arch, o'erbrimm'd

All the smoky west. In Oxford Street  
Lamps, like jewels fallen by the way  
While the sun upon his urban beat  
Bore the lofty burden of the day,

Magnified their offices and grew  
Vital and a rosary of light,  
Wreathing life that gathered heart anew  
Hungry for the pleasure of the night.

Trees of winter's nakedness aware  
Gleamed and disappeared like things afraid,  
Dryads of the terrace and the square,  
Silvery in the shadow and the shade.

Swarthy-purple creepers draped the high  
Houses ; leaves in elm-tree tops astir  
Blurred like flakes of soot the darkling sky,  
Lit with faded light of lavender.

## VI

*The Chilterns*

I remember once a glorious thing  
Crowned the season in my wandering time.  
Through the year I went from earliest Spring  
Hither, thither, weaving prose and rhyme,  
Like a gleeman of the former age.  
Sound and colour were my pensioners ;  
Constant on my passionate pilgrimage  
Love attended me, and friends of hers,

Life and Death besides. But one day, late

Roaming in the Chilterns, want of will

Irked me, and the impotence of Fate—

Something lacking in the World, until

Bluff November in the coppice near

Loud on orient horns an onset wound,

While the larks that through the golden year

Garlanded the air with dazzling sound,

Surged upon the tempest's deafening cry—

Crests of foam about the ocean driven,

Lightning scribbled on a thund'rous sky,

Tongues of flame upon the top of heaven!

## YULETIDE

NOW wheel and hoof and horn  
In every street  
Stunned to its chimney-tops,  
In every murky street—  
Each lamp-lit gorge by traffic rent  
Asunder,  
Ravines of serried shops  
By business tempests torn—  
In every echoing street,  
From early morn  
Till jaded night falls dead,  
Wheel, hoof, and horn  
Tumultuous thunder

Beat  
Under  
A noteless firmament  
Of lead.

When the winds list  
A fallen cloud  
Where yellow dregs of light  
Befouled remain,  
The woven gloom  
Of smoke and mist,  
The soot-entangled rain  
That jumbles day and night  
In city and town,  
An umber-emerald shroud  
Rehearsing doom,  
The London fog comes down.  
But sometimes silken beams,

As bright  
As adamant on fire,  
Of the uplifted sun's august attire,  
With frosty fibrous light  
Magnetic shine  
On happier dreams  
That abrogate despair,  
When all the sparkling air  
Of smoke and sulphur shriven,  
Like an iced wine  
Fills the high cup  
Of heaven ;  
For urban park and lawn,  
The city's scenery,  
Heaths, commons, dells  
That compass London rich  
In greenery,  
With diamond-dust of rime

Empowdered, flash  
At dawn ;  
And tossing bells  
Of stealthy hansoms chime  
With silvery crash  
In radiant ways  
Attuned and frozen up  
To concert pitch—  
In resonant ways,  
Where wheels and hoofs inwrought,  
Cars, omnibuses, wains,  
Beat, boom, and clash  
Discordant fugal strains  
Of cymbals, trumpets, drums ;  
While careless to arrive,  
The nerved pedestrian comes  
Exulting in the splendour overhead,  
And in the live



Elastic ground,  
The pavement, tense and taut,  
That yields a twangling sound  
At every tread.



# ECLOGUES



I

THE IDES OF MARCH

PERCY    HERBERT    BASIL    NINIAN    SANDY

PERCY

WHERE the brimming freshets rush  
And the pebbles chafe and ring,  
The leafless alders flush  
With purple of the Spring.

HERBERT

And the crimson osiers burn  
With spathes that swell and split,  
And every bract an urn  
With twinkling catkins lit.

## BASIL

Where chaos spreads unkempt,  
And formless being roves,  
I wandered lost  
Until I crossed  
The ultramundane groves,  
And dreamt last night, as Cæsar dreamt,  
I placed my hand in Jove's.

## NINIAN

And music sighed and sang,  
And voices uttered doom,  
And Mars's armour rang  
Untouched in Cæsar's room.  
Most ominous of woe,  
A wondering slave appeared,  
Whose fingers flamed below—

## SANDY

A candelabrum weird!

NINIAN

Titanic beings fought,  
In fiery arms on high ;  
The Universe was wrought  
To tragic sympathy ;  
Nor can the years dispel  
The awe of that ; nor can  
The tongues of poets tell  
The deed these signs foreran,  
For on the morrow fell  
The greatest man.

BASIL

What cry ? what whispered word ?

PERCY

What music wild and sweet ?

HERBERT

The listening air is stirred.

SANDY

The sounds are in the street.

BASIL

I hear a murmuring flood.

PERCY

I hear a trembling string.

NINIAN

The sounds are in our blood.

BASIL

The sounds are of the Spring.

HERBERT

The throstle in the brake,  
Alone, and hid away,  
Beginning to rehearse  
His long-considered lay,



Because the blossoms wake  
On the elms, the first in flower,  
Repeats a broken verse  
And tunes it by the hour.

## PERCY

And his cousin thinks him a dunce,  
The blackbird, he who sings  
At the top of his voice at once  
While the startled woodland rings :  
He peals his splendid song  
Loud and fluent and clear,  
For echo to prolong  
And all the world to hear.

## HERBERT

Now like a golden gong ;  
Now like a crystal sphere.

PERCY

For echo to prolong  
And all the world to hear.

BASIL

What sound is this that comes  
At sunset lowly pitched ?  
The roll of elfin drums  
Or song of things bewitched ?  
Perhaps the nightwind strums  
The wires, with news enriched  
Of peace, and silent drums—  
With happy news enriched  
Of silent, sleeping drums,  
With war no more bewitched.

NINIAN

At least the springtime comes ;  
For I hear in a valley I know

A sound of elfin drums,  
And a shadowy clarion blow,  
As the crimson threads and thrums  
In the twilight sky decay,  
And the wandering beetle hums  
The threnody of day.

## SANDY

When the spacious darkness comes,  
And the crimson lights decay,  
The ponderous beetle hums  
The threnody of day.

## HERBERT

The nightwind sighs and sings.

## PERCY

The darkness deepening comes.

BASIL

The antique curfew rings  
To the roll of elfin drums.

NINIAN

The flickering threads and thrums,  
The ruddy brands decay ;  
And the mournful beetle hums  
The threnody of day.

BASIL

But soon the wakening comes,  
And darkness dies forlorn ;  
And the thunder of the drums  
Of the March wind ushers morn.

NINIAN

And woes that wound the sight,  
And spectres disappear.

PERCY

And men are men of might.

HERBERT

And love is crystal-clear.

SANDY

And I swear by the light,

And the noon and the night,

It is good, it is good to be here !

## II

### ST. MARK'S EVE

BASIL

NINIAN

VIVIAN

BASIL

LATE, Vivian ! Midnight stirs  
In the placid bosom of Time.

VIVIAN

I have been in the wildwood, sirs,  
In the snare of a sovran rhyme ;  
Where blossoms and feathers and furs  
Grow rich as a dazzling rhyme—  
With stains of a fragrant rhyme ;

And the very spathes and spurs  
Are tuned to the deafening chime  
Of the larks and the courage that stirs  
In the heart of the vernal prime.

## NINIAN

In the wildwood? Here or beyond?  
At home in the world or afar?  
Where the bracken unfurls a frond,  
Or a nebula loosens a star—  
Where the fern delivers a frond,  
Or a nebula utters a star?

## VIVIAN

At home. In this hermit-nook  
Of conscious pleasure and pain  
I journeyed to listen and look—  
With wonder to listen and look

In the Warren and Honey Lane,  
By the Quicks and the Cuckoo brook  
From Epping to Chingford Plain.  
Where the passion of Nature stirs  
Undisciplined, up and down  
I wandered the wildwood, sirs,  
On the margin of London town—  
In the forest that's ours and hers  
On the threshold of London town.

## NINIAN

Did you see then the blackthorn blaze  
Against the empurpled glow  
Of the glades and the woodland ways?  
Did the violet forest glow  
Where the budded leaf delays,  
And chaplets pallid as snow  
On the twisted blackthorn blaze—



Coronals, garlands, sprays  
Like fresh, moon-silvered snow ?

## BASIL

Did you hear from Highbeach tower  
The mellow quarter-chime—  
From the belfry of Highbeach tower  
Did you hear the music of Time,  
Like silken banners unfurled ?  
From the ancient and hallowed bower  
Of the virginal bride of the world,  
Did you hear the melodious hour  
Like broidered banners unfurled—  
With the dulcet and virginal power  
Of Time, the bride of the world ?

## VIVIAN

I saw the blackthorn blaze  
Like wreaths of moonlit snow,

Where the budded leaf delays  
And the violet woodlands glow ;  
From Highbeach steepled tower  
I heard the quarter-chime—  
From the ancient and hallowed bower  
Of the beautiful virgin, Time,  
I heard the melodious vesper hour  
And the sprightly quarter-chime.  
Then the blackbird finished his song  
On a penetrant, resolute note ;  
Though the thrush descanted long,  
For he knows no tune by rote—  
With sighs descanted long  
Of the sorrow he aches to tell ;  
With sobs and shuddering moans,  
Like one that sings in Hell,  
He laced the phantom over-tones  
Of the mellow vesper-bell :

Some terror he fain would tell,  
But he never can strike the note :  
So the thrush descanted long,  
While the blackbird finished his song.  
And the woodwele's laughter ceased  
In his ash-green gurgling throat  
On the fringe of the tones released  
By the vibrant vesper-bell—  
The forest laughter ceased  
In the wake of the twilight bell,  
And high, so high, from the dusky sky  
The last lark breathless fell.  
But the nightingales sang on  
Like welling founts of sound,  
As the saffron sunset paler shone  
And the darkness grew profound ;  
The nightingales sang on  
And the sleepless cuckoos beat

Their dulcimers anon, anon,  
In the echoing woodland street—  
Their golden dulcimers anon  
In every forest street.  
And lo! from their secret bowers  
In the shadowy depths of the chace,  
With lanterns jewelled like flowers  
In state at a stately pace—  
The elfin-folk from their hallowed bowers  
In the innermost shrine of the chace,  
Came, swinging their fragrant and luminous  
    flowers,  
To dance in the market-place—  
Came with their dances and lanterned flowers  
To the forest's market-place.  
And I watched them dancing for hours  
In elfin pomp and state :  
I saw the elves and I watched them for hours,  
And therefore I come so late.

## BASIL

How say you ? An April tale  
Of the nightingale's song and the lark's ;  
Or a vision at best, or a dream ?

## NINIAN

Nay, for enchantments prevail,  
And things are as strange as they seem,  
At the mystical Tide of St. Mark's  
A pregnant fantasy stirs,  
And prodigies happen o' nights.

## VIVIAN

And I saw them, I saw them, sirs—  
The elves in their woodland rites !  
When the vesper-bell had rung,  
And the last lark dropped from the sky ;  
When the cuckoo's golden tongue,

And the nightingale's rhapsody  
Full-filled the forest with sound,  
From their secret and hallowed bowers  
In the woodland depths profound,  
From the innermost heart of the chace,  
The elves with their lanterned flowers  
Trooped forth at an elfin pace ;  
And I watched them dancing for hours  
In the forest's market-place.

### III

## THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF MAY

BASIL      NINIAN      BRIAN      VIVIAN      LIONEL

BRIAN

MUST this be Empire-Day ?

BASIL

The date is fixed.

BRIAN

Forfend

The omen, powers on high !

BASIL

Shame, traitor, shame ! Amend

So treasonous a sigh.

Empire and Empire-Day—

BRIAN

I still mistrust them, I!—

BASIL

Have come and come to stay!

BRIAN

I hate the name, the thing!

You know the prophets say,

“Empire begins the end:

The loves, the hopes we sing,

Our sweetest common good

Will fade, their source decay,

And fancy's naïve device

Unmourned depart away—

Art and our freer mood

For ever and a day.”

So stiff is empire's price,

The penalty of power.



## NINIAN

But the drama of the woods,  
That deepens every hour,  
No change in men can change,  
While the murmuring cushat broods,  
And the restless fern-owls range  
The night-winds interstrown  
With wonders, jewelled wings  
Of moths and chafers—sown  
With silken singing wings  
Of lost nocturnal things.

## LIONEL

Not fear, not love, not hate,  
Not shame, not wounded pride  
Can heighten or abate  
The jocund summer-tide

That blossoms hour by hour—  
The surf and crested tide  
Of the fragrant hawthorn flower.

## VIVIAN

No human joy or care,  
Not envy, age, or pain,  
Not the whole world's despair  
Can tarnish, taint, or stain  
One gold-bossed silver shield  
Of the daisies of the field—  
The land-wide Milky Way  
Of the myriad eyes of day.

## BRIAN

To me the amber studs  
Of the kingcups on the leas,  
And the fragrant hawthorn buds  
Are but the earth's disease ;

And the daisies in the grass  
A snowy leprosy.

BASIL

Hush, slanderer, hush ! Alas,  
How deep your discontent !

BRIAN

Imperial thoughts for me  
Decolour and unscent  
The violet and the rose ;  
For empire is the womb  
Of teeming wars and woes,  
The enemy of chance  
That keeps the world in hope,  
And the murderer and the tomb  
Of art and all romance.

## BASIL

If that's the only ill,  
The source of all your gloom,  
No longer need you mope.  
Such dire imperial doom  
Has been, and shadows still  
All landlocked empire, shut  
In one unhealthy room ;  
A drilled mechanic state  
That jolts in one deep rut—  
Whose grave, or soon or late,  
Is its habitual rut,  
By time and chance and fate  
For ever sealed and shut.

## BRIAN

Infallible rebuke  
That shames imperial pride !

BASIL

The doom that overtook  
The empires of the past ;  
The doom that must betide  
All rule however fast  
Enfeoffed with power and law,  
That makes its interest, first and last,  
To hold the world in awe.  
But England's Ocean-state  
Enthroned upon the sea,  
The armed and equal mate  
Of power and liberty,  
Has this for doom and fate—  
To set the peoples free.

LIONEL

Nobler than empire—word  
Ill-omened, out of date !—

What name shall be conferred  
On England's Ocean-state ?

BASIL

We need no other name ;  
Our origin, our fate,  
Our history speaks, our fame,  
In England's Ocean-state.

VIVIAN

Wherever England comes  
The lowliest has his chance.

LIONEL

Our English story sums  
The meaning of Romance.

BASIL

We bid the poet drink  
Till Hippocrene be dry,

And the thinker dare to think  
The sun out of the sky.

LIONEL

We bid the dreamer, drunk  
With dreaming, dream again ;  
And fakir, mollah, monk  
To any heaven attain.

BASIL

Then though these isles were sunk  
And buried in the sea,  
Our England would remain  
Wherever men are free.

NINIAN

Embattled usage falls  
At the beating of our drums ;

All proud originals  
Have scope where England comes.

## VIVIAN

As free as birds that sing  
And serenade the morn.

## LIONEL

As the swallow on the wing,  
Or the blackbird on the thorn.

## BASIL

Or the throstle, purged of scorn  
For the music in his heart—  
That takes such loving pains  
To school his angry heart,  
And now at last attains  
The mastery of his art.



IV

BAPTIST TIDE

BASIL      LIONEL      BRIAN      MENZIES

BASIL

OUTCAST and vagrant, hail !  
Unhappy, wandering star,  
You sojourn *here*, unchid ;  
We love you—as you are,  
Rejected, scorned, forbid,  
Targe of the world's abuse.

LIONEL

What nectar, dark or pale,  
To drink your happier cheer in ?  
What brew, what auburn ale,

What blood, what golden juice  
Of Albany or Erin ?

## MENZIES

The grape, the grape : no malt  
To deaden soul and sense.  
Let some illustrious wine  
My heart and brain exalt,  
And crowded opulence  
Of fantasy be mine.

## BASIL

Your brain shall teem with sights  
Desirable as youth ;  
And sense and soul divide  
The ravished world between them.

## BRIAN

Bethink you, sirs : in sooth  
We should be Nazarites,  
For this is Baptist Tide.

## LIONEL

Let formalists demean them  
As ancient modes provide :  
We take no oath, no vow ;  
Nor shall our hearts abide  
In bondage of the past.

## BASIL

The adolescent world  
Is but beginning now ;  
And men are men at last.

## BRIAN

Yet the sweet heaven unfurled  
About us like a rose,  
Nor ending, nor beginning,  
Nor age, nor ailment knows.

## LIONEL

Though that were certain, folk  
Who cannot make an end  
Of simple-hearted sinning,  
Who have their lives to spend,  
And must endure the yoke  
Of human joys and woes,  
Seek still a new beginning,  
Desire a sweeter song,  
Expect the compassed close  
Of misery and wrong.

## BASIL

A cup of wine can change  
Despair to deep delight.

## BRIAN

An overture that jars  
Upon our mood! We range

The purlieus of the night  
On thoughts that seek the stars ;  
You drag us down to earth,  
And urge a vinous mirth !

## BASIL

Nay, now ; fill, drink, and mark :—  
A Burgundy mature ;  
Romanée Conti, dark  
As carmine jewels, pure  
As Côte d'Or's golden noons,  
And spiced with dewy scent  
Of rich autumnal moons.

## BRIAN

A wine whose virtue's spent  
Before the lees appear !

## BASIL

By Dionysius, no !  
A mystery slumbers here,  
A rite, a sacrament,  
Whose nature I can show.  
We drink material power ;  
The inmost soul of wine  
Is adamant, the flower  
Of carbon : light and heat  
Long-hoarded in the mine ;  
Mettle of bread and meat ;  
The dawn whose crimson flood  
Intoxicates the east ;  
The tissue and the heart  
Of organism ; the blood,  
The seed of man and beast  
Become by Nature's art  
Sterile as candent flame,

And yet the stuff, the breath  
Of noble strife, of fame,  
Of myths that folk invent  
To give the past a name ;  
Ethereal life in death,  
Potable ravishment.

## LIONEL

The naked facts ; the truth ;  
The power, the poetry !

## BASIL

Now will our outcast see  
Some vision of his youth ;  
Of summer's flower and leaf,  
Of emprise meetly done ;  
A happy gleaner's sheaf,  
Or love, or battle won ;  
Some joy beyond belief :

For he has drunk the sun,  
Drunk up the night and day,  
Drunk down the dregs of grief,  
And drunk the world away.

## LIONEL

He sees us not, nor hears ;  
A glory fills his eyes,  
Like one through crystal tears  
Beholding Paradise.

## MENZIES

Not rubies set in gold  
Of matchless flame and worth,  
But dawn and sunset scrolled  
About the emerald earth !  
Oh, moon of my desire,  
Bend from your heaven above,



A lily sweet, on fire  
With newly budded love !  
Bend from your heaven ; be mine  
Once more before I die,  
And let life's hallowed wine  
Empurple earth and sky  
In hyacinthine hours,  
And dusky midnights hung  
With stars and passion-flowers  
And ecstasies unsung !

LIONEL

Entranced into the street  
He wanders like a shade !

BRIAN

He treads on wingèd feet :  
I think his grave is made !

## BASIL

His soul is bathed in light,  
His heart for love athirst :  
Were he to die to-night  
I scarce should call him curst.

V

THE FEAST OF ST. MARTHA

BASIL      LIONEL      VIVIAN      BRIAN

BRIAN

PERTURBED by wealth, perturbed by want,  
With angered brain and breaking heart,  
Why will the world the market haunt ?  
If folk would choose the better part !

LIONEL

Folk must be troubled ; work and think ;  
Devote their strength ; exhaust their health.  
I love St. Martha, meat and drink,  
Labour and thrift, and skill and wealth.

## VIVIAN

If exorcism avail not, leave  
The phantom woes you sorrow for.

## BRIAN

No phantoms ; facts : for facts I grieve,  
Authentic things that dreams abhor :—  
Imprisoned clouds that spin and weave  
Complex machinery of war  
  
(Torpedoes, cannon, latent rage  
Impounding peace) as easily  
As happy playmates knit a cage  
Of rushes for a butterfly.

## LIONEL

And chastened lightning, pick and choice  
Of all man's wonder-working might,

A public scribe, an airy voice,  
The dazzling conqueror of the night !

BASIL

To whisper over heath and holt,  
To herald tidings everywhere,  
To travel on a thunder-bolt  
By land, or sea, or middle air !

VIVIAN

The docile lightning ! Jupiter,  
Could no foreboding Proteus see  
Your armament celestial wear  
The livery of humanity !

BRIAN

Miraculous ; but watch them work—  
Steam, electricity : behold

Iniquity and rapine lurk

Where'er machinery forges gold !

BASIL

I grant the worst : the piston-rod

Undoes the handicraftsman, seals

The doom of labour ; clad and shod

In unseen lightning, business steals

The garnered wealth of rank and power,

The frugal means of proud content,

The widow's mite, the orphan's dower,

The toiler's hard-earned increment.

LIONEL

And thus the promise darkly given

Fulfil itself : a child can tell

In Rich-and-Poor an actual Heaven

Deep-rooted in an actual Hell !

VIVIAN

Unhallowed jest ! But let me laugh !

By all the powers without a doubt  
The railway and the telegraph  
Have brought millennium about !

BRIAN

Oh, shame ! That one man may be great  
And loll at ease, a god on high,  
Beneath, the castings of his fate,  
A myriad outworn workers sigh.

BASIL

But how if that be just ? Aha !  
The thing is so ; therefore must be.  
Skilled and unskilled automata  
Would all escape from slavery.

Whoever grasps what all esteem,  
What all desire, wealth, power, renown,  
Conceives and dares while others dream ;  
And he who wins, deserves the crown.

BRIAN

Usurious contracts, lawless gains  
That fill the workhouse, stock the haunts  
Of vice ?

BASIL

The great world's growing pains  
Whose hardy soul no evil daunts !

LIONEL

This very lightning you decry—

BRIAN

Âme damnée by the broker's hearth !  
Promoter's tout, exploiter's spy !—



LIONEL

Is yet the angel of the earth.

Not long shall men abuse the sons

Of men ; the tyrant's doom was signed

When lightning learned to rouse at once

The righteous wrath of all mankind.

BASIL

The earth itself is now inspired !

VIVIAN

It knows delight, it feels distress !

LIONEL

Ten thousand wires and nerves unwired

Have given the globe self-consciousness !

BASIL

Why brood and muse on sordid scenes,  
Why pick and point at faults and flaws ?  
Ignore uncertain ways and means ;  
Regard alone the final cause.

BRIAN

Who can declare why man was made ?

BASIL

The lover knows, the children guess ;  
War, study, pastime, toil and trade  
Have one sole purpose, Happiness.

VIVIAN

Only decaying types incur  
Remorse and moral misery !  
Were I a great philosopher  
This should my metaphysic be,

A mighty Will to Happiness.

LIONEL

Therefore it is the earth is round  
And speeds through Heaven, a globe express  
For infinite Elysium bound !

VIVIAN

Therefore the orbs that rule the year  
Establish seasonable times,  
And deck our well-appointed sphere  
In purpled robes of diverse climes.

LIONEL

Love therefore sighs with fragrant breath  
For loftier heavens and songs unsung.

BASIL

And therefore shall benignant death  
Maintain the world for ever young.

## LIONEL

Therefore were women made divine,  
With beauty, purpose, power to bless  
The overloaded masculine  
Incarnate Will to Happiness.

## VIVIAN

Therefore the all-embracing sea  
Doth with tempestuous voice demand,  
“What power shall keep the golden key  
That opes the gate of every land?”

## BRIAN

Therefore we torture heart and brain,  
And cherish neither life nor health!  
We tax the past, the future drain—

## BASIL

In our divine desire for wealth.

We must be rich : for whom should gold  
Be meant if not for you and me ?  
In every age the wise and bold  
Have gathered treasure ardently.

LIONEL

A health to England's golden rose,  
Her affluence of material stuff !

VIVIAN

A health to all the rich and those  
Who never can be rich enough !

BASIL

And health to England's thrifty sons  
And thrifty daughters ; health to all  
Courageous, battling, troubled ones  
Who keep St. Martha's Festival.

## VI

### BARTLEMAS

BASIL

LIONEL

VIVIAN

LIONEL

FROM an obsolete, festival mood—

(Ere the people grew wise and aware,  
Transcending the bad and the good,

How extinct was the Fun of the Fair)—  
Out of Smithfield with vapours endued

Of the rank Babylonian lair,  
Where Mirth and her fatherless brood

Carouse it in Bartlemy Fair,  
I come, by the mass, by the rood,

From the crusted, old Fun of the Fair!

## VIVIAN

From the Forest I come whereabout  
The silences, harvested, throng—  
Autumnal the silences throng :  
No throstle, no blackbird devout  
As the seraphim mingle their song,  
With perfume entangle the light  
And powder the woodland with pearl,  
Nor usher the star-stricken night  
With incense and melody rare ;  
The song-thrush devout and the merle  
No longer enrapture the air  
With concord of ruby and pearl.

## BASIL

Then you of the Forest shall spin  
A tissue of rhythmical words—

Of jewelled, diaphanous words ;  
And he shall delight in the din  
Of Smithfield and Bartlemas Birds—  
In the venial, carnival sin  
Of Bartholomew's roustering Birds ;  
While I as a guerdon prepare  
In our mazer of maple that held  
The hydromel, quaffed at the Fair  
And older than scriptural eld :  
As wassail and guerdon supply,  
From a formula ancient as eld  
A nectar to drink of and die,  
In our mazer of maple, that held  
The hydromel quaffed at the Fair  
Ere the people grew wise and aware.

## VIVIAN

Alack that the truth must be told !  
Not once now their dulcimers sweet,



That haunted the Forest of old,  
The cuckoos, predominant, beat ;  
Their echoing pastoral, tolled  
In every o'er-canopied street  
On dulcimers, dulcet as gold,  
Not now will the cuckoos repeat ;  
Reverberant cantos unrolled,  
A thunder of dulcimers sweet,  
Through the flower-writhen Forest of old  
No longer the cuckoos repeat.

## LIONEL

But yesterday rose on the air,  
With the odour of burning entwined,  
The breath of an agonised prayer—  
But yesterday, braiding the wind  
With an incense, nor holy, nor rare  
When they tortured the flesh and the mind—  
The body as well as the mind ;

When the learned and the lewd had to die  
For the rights of the tongue and the pen,  
And martyrdom shrouded the sky  
In the smoke of the burning of men ;  
Where now in the shouldering press  
Of the stareabouts destined to stare,  
By the booths and the stalls in the stress  
Of the tide and the trough of the Fair—  
In the narrows and straits of the Fair,  
While the cressets, the torches, and links,  
Beginning to blossom and flare  
As the sun in the occident sinks  
With phantoms embroider the air—  
While the cressets and vaporous links,  
As the sun that transfigured the Fair  
In his western brazier sinks,  
With witchcraft impregnate the air,  
Arises the mercantile cry  
As of souls in the depths of despair—

Of a people at home with despair,

“What lack you and what will you buy?”

The challenge and lure of the Fair!

“What lack you, sirs? Buy, will you buy?”

Ripe costard or Catherine pear?

Is it hey for the lust of the eye?

Will you trip it, coranto or jig?

But first you must eat or you die,

Of a hallowed Bartholomew pig—

Of a savoury Bartlemas pig!”

Then hey for the Fun of the Fair,

The babel of noise and the cry,

The turbulent shows in the glare

Of the cressets that lacquer the sky—

That fume as they lacquer the sky!

It's ho for the Fun of the Fair!

And it's hey for the lust of the eye!

Ripe costard and Catherine pear,

And the yellow gowns fluttering by—

Green sleeves at Bartholomew Fair,  
And the light of a riotous eye !

## BASIL

Green leaves in the Forest ; green sleeves—  
I modulate Lionel's cry—  
At the Fair ; in the Forest, green leaves,  
And the glance of an innermost eye.

## VIVIAN

No longer the nightingales chant  
To the silvery pulses of night,  
That echo the measure and grant  
Responsal of starry delight :  
No nightingales longer descant  
To the stars as they throb with delight  
Of the passionate answer they grant  
The music that troubles the night—

As they vibrate and bloom with delight  
In the hanging gardens of night.  
For the silences, harvested, throng,  
Though the gold and purpureal dye—  
Though the lacquer, the mordant, and dye  
Of the autumn, like sounds of a song  
Into colour transmutable, lie  
On the Forest—the crystalline tune  
That the spheres were imagined to play  
Into colour transformed in the noon  
Of an ever adventurous day ;  
Above and within and about,  
The perfected silences throng—  
In the Forest the silences throng :  
No throstle, no blackbird devout  
As the seraphim mingle their song,  
With perfume entangle the light  
And powder the woodland with pearl,

Nor usher the star-stricken night  
With incense and melody rare ;  
    The song-thrush devout and the merle  
No longer enrapture the air  
    With concord of ruby and pearl ;  
Nor now can the nightingale sing  
    Expecting a stellar reply ;  
No fugues intergarlanded ring  
    Of the earth and the clusters on high—  
Sidereal echoes that bring  
    The crystalline tears and the sigh  
For the end of a beautiful thing  
    That soldered the earth and the sky.

## VII

### OUR DAY

“Nelson had several times said to Captain Hardy and Dr. Scott, ‘The 21st will be our day.’”

—MAHAN’S *Life of Nelson*.

BASIL

VIVIAN

BASIL

THE chill wind whispers winter : night sets in ;  
And now, by many a sounding thoroughfare,  
Life, like a tidal wave, begins to fill  
The theatres and halls and hidden nooks,  
Wherein it clangs and seethes and spends  
itself.

*Enter* LIONEL

And whence come you ?

## VIVIAN

From wandering to and fro  
Somewhere in London—London the unknown;  
Which none can ever know, none ever see,  
But only wonder at and wander in !

## BASIL

The City of the World, ancient and proud,  
Vast, thronged, and awful ; richer than the floor  
Of ocean and its unsacked treasure-house ;  
An insolent city and a beautiful ;  
A place of mirth and sadness infinite :  
Of infinite horror, infinite despair,  
Infinite courage and felicity.  
What ! Do we read your thoughts, your eyes  
that speak  
Of greatnesses beheld ?



## LIONEL

All day I saw

A greater thing than London ; now at night  
The ample vision looms more excellent—  
The vision of a thing that shall endure  
When London is as Babylon ; shall shine  
A jewel in eternal memory ;  
Shall on the summit of achievement burn,  
A challenge and a beacon for the brave :  
The perfect battle-pageant of the deep,  
Trafalgar.

## BASIL

You beheld Trafalgar ?

## LIONEL

Now !

I watch it now !

## VIVIAN

Show us this sight of sights !  
Make us behold Trafalgar and the pride  
Of England, Nelson !

## LIONEL

Look and see ; who looks  
With insight, can ! A fragile form,  
The delicate sheath of valour absolute ;  
Ambition, daring, honour, constancy,  
Prescience, dominion, passion, scope, design,  
A woman's tenderness, an infant's awe,  
An adamant courage, mercy, power  
Attuned and fateful in an invalid !  
Sea-lord, sea-god, his clear, transcendent love  
Endowed his friends with lustre of his own,  
And saw no blemish for excess of light

Which his great spirit shed : his glittering  
scorn,

His hate for England's sake of England's foes,  
Diviner than his love, at England's need  
O'erthrew the splendid Titan who essayed  
To wrest the loyal sea from English hands,  
Holding in trust that greatest gift of Fate.

The Nile, the Baltic, saw his pregnant war ;  
The palsied navies shrivelled at his touch ;  
So suddenly he came, so swiftly smote,  
So wholly conquered, that his deeds remain  
The bulwark maritime of England's power.  
Nothing could tame his soul : that ocean-hunt  
About the Atlantic and about in quest  
Of action France and Spain denied,  
Whetted his lust of battle ; long delay,  
That withers enterprise and rots desire  
Even of enduring things, augmented all

His purpose and matured the valiant seed  
Of utmost victory. Wherefore upon the dawn  
Foreknown of battle—for the Admiral said  
“The twenty-first will be our day”—he paced  
His quarter-gallery subtly clad already  
In the shadow of his glory; prepossessed  
Besides with death; and like a spirit calm  
That treads the threshold of eternity.

Now, when the morning brimmed the western  
world,

And on the weather-gleam a headland rose  
Assured of fame, and the confederate fleets  
Appeared between, hull crowding hull, five  
miles

Of armament, our great sea-warrior bade  
The battle be. Southward the ships of France,  
The ships of Spain, northward the English  
sailed,

As if they meant to pass each other by  
In some majestic ritual of the tide.  
But Nelson's signals, winged like thought aloft,  
Undid that minuet! Twelve sail of his,  
The weather line, with Collingwood to lee,  
Bore up amain—the wind west by nor'-west—  
And eastward stood athwart the banded fleets,  
That veered unwieldily and headed north  
With safe retreat on Cadiz, till Nelson's touch  
Precipitated battle—he on their van  
And Collingwood against their southern flank:  
Two columns opportunely; yet to the end  
The sailing order held the battle-line—  
Our Admiral's prophecy and inspired device.  
That happy signal first: "England expects  
That every man will do his duty"; then  
Drums beat to quarters: gunners, stripped and  
girt,

The naked flesh of England against the fire  
And rending bolt of England's foes, unlash'd  
Their ordnance : frowning crews, equipped  
With linstock, priming-iron, rammer, wad,  
Crowbar and handspike, cartridge, wreaths of  
shot,

Stood by each carronade, each red-lipp'd gun ;  
Topman and boarder, trimmer, musketeer,  
Marine and powder-boy fulfilled his post,  
His deed, his errand, transfigured suddenly.  
The ceremonial wind controlled the approach,  
Keeping a pageant-pace ; and towering sails  
Of England's navy, sheeted to the sky,  
Slumbered at ease, a dulcet, virgin sleep,  
So placid in their bosoms the breath of heaven  
Dwelt like a dream, as every vessel, groomed  
For war and marshalled on the vagrant surge  
Of coming tempest, rode to victory.

France fired the nuptial gun ; the flags broke out  
Of every nation, and the battle joined.

In front of England the *Royal Sovereign* first  
Achieved the enemy's range. The *Victory* next,  
Silent against a navy's broadsides, forged  
Ahead ; and when her double-shotted guns,  
One after one, at twenty feet had ploughed  
The *Bucentaure* endlong, aboard the doomed  
*Redoubtable* she ran. Forthwith amid  
The din of cannon against cannon, mouth  
To bellowing mouth, the shriek of timber  
crashed

And rent, the thund'rous voice of men absorbed  
In the wild trance and waking dream of war,  
Carnage and agony and the rhythmic swing  
And travail of the deed, as Nelson paced  
His quarter-deck awaiting the superb,  
Unmatched event his genius had ordained,

The fatal marksman in the enemy's top  
Espied his honours and England's hero fell.  
Down in the winepress of the war where  
    blood

O'erflowed the orlop, where the wounded  
    strewn

The noisome cockpit and the grimy sweat  
Cooled on the labouring surgeons, Nelson died:  
The swarthy smoke that coiled from poop to  
    hold

Obscured the glimmering lanterns ; overhead  
The cannon leapt ; like a taut rope the hull  
Quivered from stem to stern with every shot ;  
And still above the thunder of the strife,  
Cresting the uproar, pealed the great hurrah  
Of all the English crews, as ship by ship  
The baffled navies struck and Nelson's name  
Became immortal.



VIVIAN

Such a dying deed !

BASIL

So great a life, so great a death, so great  
A legacy of Empire !

LIONEL

All are ours

## VIII

### NEW YEAR'S EVE

CYRIL    BERTRAM    EVERARD    CLARENCE

#### CYRIL

THE earth reposes : bird and beast  
Are neutral-hued in copse and dell ;  
The very grass-green turf has ceased  
To grow till Spring shall break the spell.

#### BERTRAM

From frozen seas the north wind blows,  
From sapphire icebergs rooted deep  
In Arctic fathoms.

EVERARD

Ancient snows  
About the poles renew their sleep.

CYRIL

Old continents of snow—world-old !  
How comfortable there to lie  
Embalmed in everlasting cold  
In peace and crystal purity !

CLARENCE

Let these amenities increase ;  
But though the north be hoar with rime,  
Give me the vineyard's purple peace,  
The golden peace of harvest-time ;  
  
A peace with cannon frankly girt,  
An armament in every sea ;

A peace that wears a blood-red skirt  
Deep-dyed in many a victory ;

The purity of healthy lives,  
Of love that sings both high and low,  
Of genial husbands, happy wives,  
Of mothers purer than the snow.

#### CYRIL

Winter's a dream : the fallows feel  
The hope of tilth ; each blossom chaste,  
Against the cold in Milan steel  
Of stout hibernacle encased,

Glow with a vision of the Spring,  
The fragrance and the stain of June ;  
And thrushes on a sudden sing  
The motive of their Summer tune.

BERTRAM

Hush ! hark ! St. Paul's !

EVERARD

Each vibrant thought,  
An orb of music, fills the ear  
With rich harmonics interwrought.

CYRIL

The year is dead !

BERTRAM

Long live the year !

EVERARD

Now midnight through the city rings ;  
A hundred reeling belfries chime,  
With overtones like rhythmic strings,  
The lofty madrigal of Time.

## CYRIL

The world speeds in a trance profound  
From dark abyss to dark abyss  
Across this twelve-arched bridge of sound  
Between the two eternities.

## BERTRAM

Who'll give the dreaming earth a shock,  
Who set its torpid mind aglow ?

## CYRIL

Is there an ink to etch the rock,  
Ethereal lye to blanch the snow ?

A cresset to contain the sun,  
A crystal cup to hold the sea,  
A voice to rouse the dead and done,  
A highway through the galaxy ?

Discover these, or things as strange,  
Then shift the earth and turn the year !  
Discover these, then seek to change  
The mood of men, the world's career !

## CLARENCE

There is a dish to hold the sea,  
A brazier to contain the sun,  
A compass for the galaxy,  
A voice to wake the dead and done !  
  
That minister of ministers,  
Imagination, gathers up  
The undiscovered Universe  
Like jewels in a jasper cup.  
  
Its flame can mingle north and south ;  
Its accent with the thunder strive ;

The ruddy sentence of its mouth  
Can make the ancient dead alive.

The mart of power, the fount of will,  
The form and mould of every star,  
The source and bound of good and ill,  
The key of all the things that are,

Imagination, new and strange  
In every age, can turn the year,  
Can shift the poles and lightly change  
The mood of men, the world's career.

#### CYRIL

What cry is this ? What mad to-do ?  
When and by whom is this great power  
That melts and forges worlds anew  
Installed and used ? The man, the hour ?



## CLARENCE

No other time—we understand

Nor whence, nor whither, why nor how—

Is ever at the world's command

Than this eternal present Now.

## CYRIL

You rede the riddle of the earth,

The ancient rule of all who ride ;

And young it is as every birth,

As new and fresh as time and tide :—

By town and tower, through brake and briar,

About the world while life shall last,

Unbroken horses shod with fire

The wild-eyed moments thunder past :

Who grasps the flying mane and mounts,  
Indifferent if he fail or thrive,  
In happy stride with all that counts  
Arrives where'er the gods arrive.

#### CLARENCE

'Tis not enough to mount and ride,  
No saddle, bridle, whip, nor spur ;  
To take the chance of time and tide,  
And follow fame without demur.

I want some reason with my rhyme,  
A fateful purpose when I ride ;  
I want to tame the steeds of Time,  
To harness and command the tide :

I want a whip whose braided lash  
Can echo like the crack of doom ;

I want an iron mace to smash

The world and give the peoples room.

CYRIL

We thought we knew you ! Who are you

That talk so loud ?

CLARENCE

One who can tell

That false is false and true is true,

Alive or dead, in Heaven or Hell.

## L'ENVOI

BORN, enamoured, built of fact,  
Daily on destruction's brink  
Venture all to put in act  
Truth we trust and thought we think.

Nothing has been said or done :  
Free from the forbidding past,  
Knowledge only now begun  
Makes an actual world at last.

Powers of Earth, of Heaven, of Hell,  
Blent in us and tried and true,  
By dynamic deed and spell  
Forge and mould the world anew.

# ON POETRY



## ON POETRY

WHEN my Testaments and Tragedies began I thought I was to write blank verse to the end. A year ago, however, an exposition of rhyme overtook me. This volume, with a new speculative interest in rhyme itself, is the result.

Rhyme is probably seven hundred years old; still, I suppose it may be called modern. The fall of Constantinople, the invention of printing, and the Renaissance make a great frontier between the new and the antique; but, behind this frontier and buttressing it, there stretches back, among other spurs and ranges, the quasi-popularisation of poetry by the Minnesingers and the Troubadours in the gorgeous decadence of the last crusades. These liberal minstrels led Poetry out of the

study and the scriptorium into the court and the camp, and arrayed her for her novel rôle in the new-fangled frippery of rhyme. The nun became a glee-maiden, or rather, as they could not lead about a naked goddess, they paraded instead a bedizened harlotry, very delightful and much more convenable than the austere and unadorned beauty of rhymeless verse ; and since the days of the Minnesingers, the Jongleurs, Trouvères, and Troubadours, and from Dante to Mr. Swinburne, the exquisite adornment of rhyme has corrupted the ear of the world. Rhyme is a property of decadence ; but decadence in any art is always the manure and root of a higher manifestation of that art. Dante and Petrarch quickly subdued the new wanton mode. In time there came into being the French Alexandrine and the English rhymed pentameter, and, as the crown of the whole poetical aim of the world, English blank verse. Yet, at its best, rhyme is a decadent mode, although great ages and great poets have made it the



vehicle of creative work. It is a special flattery of the external ear; it is as rouge on the cheek and belladonna on the eye; or it is an excrescence like a sixth finger, "a wasteful and ridiculous excess." I am not thinking of bad poetry, but of the best. Take the first quatrain of Shakespeare's seventy-third sonnet:—

"That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

The rhymes of this quatrain toll like a dead-bell; we pass from a sombre forest to a dim cathedral; the fancy is overwhelmed with vision, both detailed and indefinite, in order to bring the rhymes about; there is a feeling of effort, as of a thing achieved; and it is the rhyme that achieves. It is not the poet, not the poetry, but the rhyme that requires this laborious "or none, or few"; it is the rhyme that requires those superbly imagined "boughs which shake against the cold" to

shift at once as by the waft of a rococo conjurer's wand into "bare ruin'd choirs." Yet it is beautiful, it is poignant; it entertains the fancy, fills the eye and ear, and touches the soul.

But, now, let Macbeth say the same thing without rhyme:—

"My way of life  
Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf."

No comment is necessary; the hair of the flesh stands up, and one feels that there is a great gulf fixed between rhyme and blank verse.

I know nothing so entertaining, so absorbing, so full of contentment, as the making of blank verse; it is a supreme relief of nervous tension, the fullest discharge of emotion, the greatest deliverance of energy; it satisfies the blood and the brain, the bones and the marrow. Whether the reader be friend or foe, I wish him to regard my authority in the matter; and I bring as a credential a passage of my own blank verse. The passage I quote

is not my own selection, nor would I have chosen it ; it has been singled out by others.

“ Undo the past !

The rainbow reaches Asgard now no more ;  
Olympus stands untenanted ; the dead  
Have their serene abode in earth itself,  
Our womb, our nurture, and our sepulchre.  
Expel the sweet imaginings, profound  
Humanities and golden legends, forms  
Heroic, beauties, tripping shades embalmed  
Through hallowed ages in the fragrant hearts  
And generous blood of men ; the climbing thoughts  
Whose roots ethereal grope among the stars,  
Whose passion-flowers perfume eternity,  
Weed out and tear, scatter and tread them down ;  
Dismantle and dilapidate high heaven.”

That the above passage should be both fluent and powerful stands to reason, as it is the long-matured, spontaneous expression of a permanent mood of the world which has its crises in reformations and revolutions, and which in the twentieth century will arm itself for action more hearted and more terrible than all the wars and persecutions of the past, and which will restore to religion, art, and letters a youth and a freshness more radiant and

more fragrant than they ever wore even in their prime and pristine vigour. The world is only beginning. We have done nothing, said nothing, sung nothing. The history of the past is the history of one empire at a time. Now several empires must compete together. The world will yet know more essential personalities than Buddha and Christ, greater men than Cæsar and Napoleon, deeper passion and wider humanity than Shakespeare's, a music still more elemental than Wagner's, a sadder soul than Schopenhauer's, a more triumphant intellect than Nietzsche's, beauty more enthralling than Helen's. Even the man in the train knows that we live in the newest times ; it is borne in upon him, half fearfully, half ecstatically, as he reads his morning newspaper, that the world is barely adolescent, and that its majority cannot be until after a thousand years of war between the East and the West, when the yellow man and the white man have fought it out on equal terms, and learnt which is master.

Poetry is Matter become vocal, a blind force without judgment. Much there is a poet can control; he acquires a vocabulary, sifts and sorts; he can select the theme of his poem, and the weight and convolutions of his brain determine the power and variety of his rhythm, but the purport of his poetry is not within his own control. A hard saying, in England of all places; but I mean it. Milton undertakes to justify the ways of God to man in "Paradise Lost." He may have done so in terms of his theology—who cares? That is not the poetry of his epic; the poetry of it is the love of Adam and Eve, and the rebellion of Satan. He who set out to justify the ways of God to man lives in the heart and soul of every stockbroker, soldier, adventurer, artist, poet, by one line which no one who knows it ever forgets: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." The very voice of Matter; the vapours, earths, and metals, the complected properties of Matter of which man consists, become eloquent; it

is the voice of rocks and ores, of patriotism, of art, of religion, of all unconquerable will; the triumph of the martyr at the stake; the "yea and amen" of that pure flame which our Universe was once and will be once more. Matter says its will in poetry; above all, in English blank verse, and often, as in the case of Milton, entirely against the conscious intention of the poet. When Matter uses a free mind, "of imagination all compact," like Shakespeare's, then are its happiest moments; it is then it can express the flower and fragrance of its highest achievement, the human race, in the night-watches of Juliet; the mutability of its own substance in Prospero's speech of "the great globe itself"; and its own subconscious memories of the fire of the nebula and the terror and splendour of its contraction and resolution into a Universe in the speech of Claudio:—

"This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside

In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice ;  
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world."

Our English blank verse is to me an intimation of something very great and high, and a thing so simple that a child can understand it; but language is so saturated with metaphysic, æsthetic, and every kind of immateriality, that it is almost impossible to get it said. It must be tried. English blank verse came into being when a new mode of expression was needed—by the design of Providence, the theologian will say; in metaphysic, as an inevitable outcome of the conditions; or, as I can feel, see, and grasp it best, English blank verse came into being like folk, or flowers, or cholera, or war, or lightning, or light, as a material emanation of the concrete mystery, Matter; that is to say, the earth, having cooled down and produced life in plants, *plus* consciousness in animals, *plus* self-consciousness, or what is called soul,

in men; men having found in the temperate mid-regions of Europe their fittest environment, and all that was most courageous, hardest, and most ambitious in the North Temperate Zone having poured into England instinctively as into the womb of the future, and having fought there together for centuries in Wars of the Heptarchy, Norman Conquests, Scotch Wars of Independence—Angle, Saxon, Jute, Dane, Norseman, and Norman wrestling together for the mastery, and producing in the struggle the blended breed of men we know: so tried and welded, so tempered and damascened, this English race, having thrown off the fetters of a worn-out creed, having obtained the kingdom of the sea and begun to lay hands, as by right, on the new world, burst out into blank verse without premeditation, and earth thrilled to its centre with delight that Matter had found a voice at last. I think it is not the opinion of Englishmen alone, but of all serious students of literature, that English blank verse is the subtlest,



most powerful, and most various organ of utterance articulate faculty has produced. In some quarters it is still debated whether blank verse or prose is the better vehicle of dramatic utterance; and the superiority of prose is supported by Hamlet's speech of "this goodly frame the earth," and "the paragon of animals." The effect on the mind of the intelligent reader of that prose speech of Hamlet's is probably greater than the effect of any of the blank verse of the play; but it is a different effect, and only those who dislike poetry can prefer it to Hamlet's verse utterances. The prose, moreover, is not nearly so wonderful as its admirers maintain. "This majestical roof fretted with golden fire" is superficial imagery; and the outcry beginning, "What a piece of work is a man!" is only a very fine exclamatory passage, trumpets and instruments of percussion compared with the "gradual violin" of blank verse. I have never had any doubt that blank verse is as much superior to prose for the pur-

poses of dramatic art as oil-colour is to water-colour in painting; and Shakespeare was of the same opinion, because he chose blank verse generally for all his higher matter to the end of his career.

This wonderful style of expression, blank verse, came into being in a small speck of sparsely inhabited land elbowed out upon the smallest continent of one of the most insignificant planets of the least considerable system in the Universe. Bulk, spacial magnitude, are not momentous, are in themselves neither significant nor efficient. The earth is to the Universe as England is to the rest of the globe, small in itself and small in relation to its continent or system. But out of our nook-shotten isle comes the profoundest and most intelligent voice of Matter, English blank verse; and by this salient and infinitely satisfying analogy, I leap to the conclusion that Matter nowhere in the Universe has evolved anything transcending mundane man, or a nobler utterance than this very blank verse.

Whether he be Homer the nondescript, Dante the outcast, Shakespeare the player, or Burns the exciseman, the great poet is always a man apart, separated out by his genius, and by some tragic circumstance. He may have to extort a living as a mendicant; he may provide for himself handsomely at a terrible cost, until his name "receives a brand," and his nature is almost "subdued to what it works in"; or he may die of a broken heart gauging whiskey-barrels—that was the most withering tragedy of all: but he is always great, always an imperial person; he may be neglected and despised in his lifetime, but his will is always to live, his will is always set on power, his empire remains. That is the great poet; and his great poetry is the affirmation of the will to live, the affirmation of the will to power. This imperial passion to be finds expression in such an utterance as Romeo's death-speech, ending:—

"Here's to my love! (*Drinks.*) O true apothecary!  
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die."

You are in the presence of the final triumph of the will to live, which every sane suicide must be; despair—really the highest power and sublimation of hope—choosing death rather than resignation; the will to live, the pride of life that *cannot* renounce, the beautiful, the transcendent passion whereby the world survives, destroying itself rather than want its will.

The mate of the imperial passion to be, that other imperial passion, the will to power, cries out upon its topmost note in the stupendous agony of the last act of “Macbeth”—any speech of Macbeth’s in that act; take the one—not the greatest—ending:—

“I ’gin to be aweary of the sun,  
And wish the estate of the world were now undone.  
Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! come, wrack!  
At least we’ll die with harness on our back.”

The poet—Macbeth is pure poet, will to live and will to power informing and impassioning an imagination which is its own and only law; Macbeth, stark imagination, steeped in the

blood of friend and foe ; dying of suppressed remorse ; unslept, mad ; beguiling himself—consciously, dauntlessly beguiling himself with the foolishlest kind of augury, will not renounce, will not resign : “ If I cannot have my way, then let the world end ; not me only, see you, but the world. I’ll have *it* stopped too ”—the final triumph of the will to power. There is nothing more astonishing in Shakespeare than the last words of Macbeth. This gentleman and soldier, who wooed and won his splendid, powerful wife, with all her “ red gold and green forests ”—a Rita Allmers, unable, unwilling, to make her peace with “ the great, open eyes ”—this proud king and eloquent, who spoke in wonderful poems, when the last gossamer thread of witchcraft is blown away by Macduff’s announcement of his untimely birth, becomes on the instant crude boy, stripped of everything except the will to power—to get the better of the other fellow. And Macbeth enjoys his last fight ; he rushes into it, adapting and shouting out

a bombastic tag from some story he had read in his schooldays :—

“ Before my body  
I throw my warlike shield : lay on, Macduff ;  
And damned be him that first cries “ Hold, enough ! ”

To me that is more pregnant with dramatic insight than Lear’s “ Pray you, undo this button.”

Nothing is easier than to recognise great poetry : simply, it makes men desire the fullness of time ; it makes men desire puissance and applause ; and it provides them with an antepast of these.

I have not selected my illustrations ; I took those that first suggested themselves, and refer the reader to the speeches in which the quotations, themselves of small poetic value, occur. I remember, however, certain homœopathic doses—touchstones or re-agents, tincture of the sun, diamonds of the first water—exhibited by Matthew Arnold in some preface or other. There is no question of *their* quality. They were adduced in illus-

tration of his Aristotelian "high seriousness," the mark of the greatest poetry. I dislike the phrase "high seriousness": a pedantic frowsiness hangs about it; it is redolent of classroom and lecture—precinct and atmosphere alien to the genius of poetry. But before I transmute this phrase, let me quote Matthew Arnold's specimens. I remember three of them; if not all from one preface, they are his selection, and they are sufficient; they were chosen by a master in verbal criticism.

The first is from Henry IV.'s complaint upon sleep:—

"Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge."

The dazzling adventurousness of the imagery, and the perfect security thereof; the completeness of the vision, full of the darkness of night; the humming water, the diapason of the storm, and the soul of the world in the wet ship-boy at rest in the lap of fate, bring

the heart into the mouth, and bend the will upon the noblest love and the loftiest deeds.

The second is one line:—

“Absent thee from felicity awhile.”

Who shall imagine what sudden sight flashed upon Hamlet's dying fancy, what Shakespeare saw as he penned that golden line? Some eternity of passionate emprise, some

“wonder, at the least,  
Which into words no virtue can digest.”

The third is the naked will to power:—

“And courage never to submit or yield,  
And what is else not to be overcome.”

These three ensamples have this character in common that they fill the mind with a sense of everlastingness, and dispose the heart to undertake and to perform the labours of Hercules with ease and delight. Repeat any of these passages with a sense of their import, and you have a feeling like that of the earth itself which moves in its appointed orbit, unresting, unhasting, poised in space



and swift about the sun, a conscious miracle. And thus, if we must have a single phrase to denote the nature of great poetry, let us say that its inmost being is a "transcendent mirth," maternity that sings a song in the pangs of travail, life that will be life, and a radiant fighting welcome to the stroke of doom. Poetry is the will to live and the will to power; poetry is the empire. Poetry is life and force; and England, being most amply replenished with the will to live and the will to power, possesses in her blank verse the greatest poetry in the world.

But in spite of the superiority of blank verse, the exquisite adornment of rhyme will continue to corrupt the ear, the seeing ear as well as the hearing ear; it is mainly with the ear the reader of poetry sees. A speculative writer suggested once that the eye is a degenerate organ, the malversation of some higher perceptive power, inconceivable in range and penetration. By such an analogy the ear was originally intended for vision as

well as audition ; the tympanum and tympanic membrane, when one considers them, are clearly a combination of mirror and sounding-board. Why the mirror remains inoperative we cannot say, since no blind beggar has, up to this time of writing, developed vision by light refracted through the auditory canal ; but the reader of poetry knows very well that the optic nerve responds like a taut string to the rhymes that vibrate in the membranous labyrinth of the ear ; and he knows also that the prompt vision flashed on the inward eye by the percussion of rhyme has injured the palate of this double sense of seeing and hearing, so that the subtler sound and loftier sight transmitted by the rhythm of blank verse are hardly possible now to his over-stimulated, frayed, and angry senses. Poetry is therefore as little understood as it ever was, rhyme—as necessary to the general verse-reader as brandy to the brandy-drinker—being only an ornament. A sense of shame, indeed, struggles vainly towards a blush in

the cheeks of the many-headed when it turns its galaxy of eyes on a page of blank verse; its subconscious feeling is of something indecorous, if not indecent. The feeling is just. Blank verse is nude poetry, barbarous and beautiful, or athletic and refined, but always naked and unashamed. Civilisation, which in all countries is in great part a development and a sanction of every kind of stupidity and misconception, could perhaps be helped out of its utter artistic perdition in England by a great thing, native here—blank verse, namely; and by another great thing, which we should have to import—sculpture. But that could only be brought about as a result of some great national movement, when the minds and imaginations of all men are fused into one mood of aspiration, and so uplifted into unwonted power.

Schopenhauer has an interesting and questionable note on this subject. Having spoken wisely and well of rhyme as an unexpected present which agreeably surprises us, he pro-

ceeds to affirm that rhyme is, of its nature, binary; "its effect," he says, "is limited to one single recurrence of the same sound, and is not strengthened by more frequent repetition, because the first note does not sound through the second on to the third; therefore the third recurrence is an æsthetic pleonasm, a double courage which is of no use." To me rhyme itself is the double courage. Call it a beautiful disease, an excess of health, having come into being it obeys the law that came into being with it.

Let me illustrate by quotations from this book:—

"Not now can the nightingale sing,  
Expecting a stellar reply;  
No fugues intergarlanded ring  
Of the earth and the clusters on high—  
Sidereal echoes that bring  
The crystalline tears and the sigh  
For the end of a beautiful thing  
That soldered the earth and the sky."

—*Bartlemas*.

Here each recurrence of the rhyme doubles the effect of its predecessor. Violins and

cymbals begin with “sing” and “reply”; with “ring” and “high” the second fiddles and the oboes join in; with “bring” and “sigh” the clarionet and the bass viol speak aloud; and all these sounds are still vibrating in the ear when “thing” and “sky” complete the diapason with the remaining wood-wind and the brass.

A second quotation to show that a word can be used as a rhyme to itself:—

“From the Forest I come whereabout  
The silences, harvested, throng—  
Autumnal, the silences throng.  
No throstle, no blackbird devout  
As the seraphim mingle their song,  
With perfume entangle the light  
And powder the woodland with pearl,  
Nor usher the star-stricken night  
With incense and melody rare;  
The song-thrush devout and the merle  
No longer enrapture the air  
With concord of ruby and pearl.”

—*Bartlemas.*

A tabor leads off upon “about”; a single clarigold rings in the first “throng”; and

two others immediately take up the burden an octave lower in the second "throng"; "devout" and "song" bring in the psaltery and the anome; "light," "night," "rare," "air," add to these sackbuts and timbrels; with the first "pearl" the dulcimer sounds; the syrinx replies in "merle"; the second "pearl" is a double dulcimer; and the whole fantastic orchestra fills the evening air with richly braided sound.

Schopenhauer is evidently wrong. The law in the matter is this: the effect of a rhyme increases geometrically in the ratio of its recurrence.

It will be seen that both of these quotations are decadent verse, the first dealing with a matter, namely, the music of the spheres, which is no longer an accepted myth, while the second is a threnody celebrating the fall of the leaf. Rhyme is originally a property of decadence; and when new decay demands expression a new order of rhyme is certainly evolved. The form of re-echoing rhyme which

I have used in some of the eclogues in this volume comes, of course, from America, the exquisite invention of the most original genius in words the world has known—Edgar Allan Poe. It is impossible to over-estimate the intensity of the mood in which this poet discovered that the same word can rhyme to itself with an entirely new sound if the preceding phraseology is changed; this is the intensity that gilds the autumn leaf, that emigrates to America and establishes the United States, that crimsons the evening sky, that crosses the Atlantic to haunt Europe passionately, that fills a dying fancy with the whole past in a moment of time. America is the decadence of Europe. Chivalry reappears there in the tyranny of pretty women and the liberty of divorce. Religion becomes a coarse sentimental pietism, and revisits us with an impudent slap in the face in the form of Moody and Sankey; our splendid robbers, Clive, Hastings, Rhodes, degenerate there into the pickpockets of the Trusts; there the Celt

flourishes, and the negro is burned alive. I find all that in "Ulalume" and "The Haunted Palace." Poe's poems are the decadence of the literature of Europe, the seed of the literature of America: they, and not Whitman's overrated rhapsodies. But all decadent forms can immediately become *crescive*: I have used this form of re-echoing rhyme in an ascendant poem in this volume, "Merry England." Literary criticism is in its infancy: the great *crescive* poem of Christendom, "The Divine Comedy," took the decadent form of rhyme; the great decadent poem of Christendom, "Paradise Lost," fell upon the ascendant form of blank verse.

*April 1906.*





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